/9/

*241 313 4. Felling—yup chign or yup chichign. The felling of the trees is almost an art in itself, for doing it in good style requires knowledge and ability, a steady eye and calculation, especially as to how the trees will fall or how they must be cut in order to fall in the most desirable way. There is a certain method involved in felling trees: a larger tree is chosen (whenever possible, in one of the corners, or at least on one of the higher sides of the ground), and an imaginary line is drawn enclosing a strip /of ground/ that broadens out in the shape of a wedge. Within this strip, all trunks are chopped about halfway through, until they begin to snap. But the larger tree is chopped last, all the way through, and felled. It falls on the neighboring, half-cut trees, dragging them down in its fall, and through them all the other trunks within the chosen and prepared wedge. An entire strip of forest thus goes down at one fell swoop with a big noise, opening an enormous clearing, sometimes 100 meters long or more. Then, whatever timber may have been left standing is felled, and so are the remaining corners, "to straighten out the shape," rounding off or squaring off the plot. But "only these are cut down one by one."

[221] The felling of trees is usually carried out in April and May. The time of felling is determined by that of clearing, which precedes it by about two to four weeks. As a rule, the Munduruku takes three days' work to do the felling on an average plot.

*241 372 5. The burning—imapign. The vegetation felled to clear the new plot is kept "resting" for two months or more, in order to dry thoroughly. The Munduruku usually burn their clearings around the month of August. They grant the sun sufficient time to dry even the larger trunks. This relatively long spell /is granted/ so that the vegetation may burn as thoroughly as possible. The burning then becomes a light and easy task. Whatever trunks may still chance to remain after the burning are left right there, and are frequently utilized as a source of firewood for the village or house. As a rule, the plots of the Munduruku are quite thoroughly burned.

/10/ To set the fire, they choose a breezy day when the wind is not too strong. Thus the breeze feeds the flames but does not allow

/10 cont./

*241 372 them to work too quickly, or else they would merely burn the small branches and foliage and leave the trunks intact. The trees would be charred rather than burned.

To set the brush on fire, the Mundurukú use torches made of dry straw or of certain resinous woods. With them, they set fire to various parts of the clearing. If there are other gardens or even houses nearby, and danger that the fire may reach them, they often [816] burn first a narrow strip of brush lying below the wind, so that later on the great fire in the clearing will meet a firebreak and will not go on to the neighboring forest or house. As a rule, they also prefer to burn the clearings before they set fire to the grasslands, as is their [82] custom. According to them, the burning of huge expanses of grasslands would attract rainfalls that would interfere with the burning of the clearings.

6. The remaining brush. Taipa is "the brush"; "to pile up the brush" = taipa chign or taipa chichign; "to burn the brush" — taipa mapign or simply imapign, "to burn."

While the thin branches and trunks burn within hours or within a day, the larger trunks take longer, burning down slowly. Then comes the turn of the remaining brush. Foliage, branches, and pieces of timber which have not burned up completely are gathered together and piled up on top of the thicker, still smoldering trunks, the better to destroy them. Then fire is set once more to this pyre, in order to reduce the remaining timber to ashes and clear the ground for planting.

Like all garden tasks, the burning, the piling up of the brush, and the burning of the pyre require practice and ability. Otherwise the Indian will get a poorly burned field.

*24 [221] 7. Digging and planting. Next comes the time of planting, in the month of September or October, depending on the first rains. Men and women go to the new plot to plant together. Planting is a dual task consisting of two distinct acts: digging or opening up the ground, and planting, /11/ that is to say, slipping the bitter-manioc [462] shoots into the ground. The first task is the man's, the second the woman's.